

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)



COVID-19 Parental Resources Kit – Early Childhood

Social, Emotional, and Mental Well-being of Young Children during COVID-19

Updated Aug. 20, 2020

[Print](#)

Resources, by Age Group

[Overview](#)

Early Childhood (0-5y)

[Childhood \(6-12y\)](#)

[Adolescence \(13-17y\)](#)

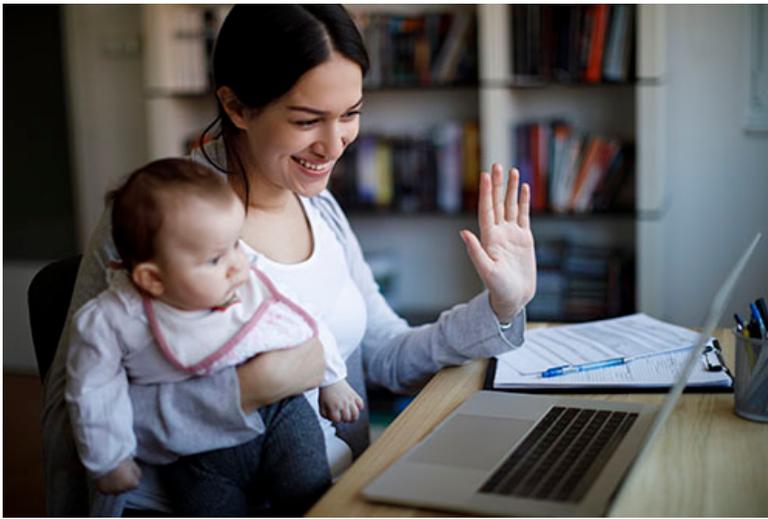
[Young Adulthood \(18-24y\)](#)

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) can affect young children, birth to 5 years, directly and indirectly. Beyond getting sick, many young children’s social, emotional, or mental well-being has been impacted by the pandemic. Trauma faced at this developmental stage may have long-term consequences across their lifespan. CDC’s [COVID-19 Parental Resource Kit: Ensuring Children and Young People’s Social, Emotional, and Mental Well-being](#) can help support parents, caregivers, and other adults serving children and young people in recognizing children and young people’s social, emotional, and mental challenges and helping to ensure their well-being.

Challenges

Change in routines

In addition to everyday steps to prevent COVID-19, [physical or social distancing](#) is one of the best tools we have to avoid being exposed to the virus and to slow its spread. When children are very young, their parents and caregivers—including extended family members, a [worship community](#), and childcare workers—provide them with daily



caretaking routines that support their development and well-being (i.e., diaper changes, feeding, hair combing). Disruptions in these routines and the sudden loss of usual caregivers due to the need to physically distance can be traumatic for young children. It is important for parents to support

young children by ensuring their own social, emotional, and mental health. Establishing [routines and structure](#) for young children with other trusted caregiver(s) (e.g., babysitters) who also practice social distancing and hygiene measures can provide support to parents with caretaking responsibilities, giving parents time to take healthy steps to [cope with their own stress](#).

Break in continuity of care or learning

Intermittent daycare and school closures may mean that young children have to stay at home while parents and caregiver juggle caretaking, supervision of [play and learning](#), and potential telework responsibilities. Keeping young children at home is one way to help stop the spread of COVID-19. Depending on your child's age and ability, supervision of play may



require more hands-on engagement. Unfortunately, some parents do not have jobs that offer telework. It is important for parents to determine how their family's composition and access to social supports (i.e., individual and work policies) could make caretaking of young children less challenging. For families with children who have special needs, extra social supports may be required.

Break in continuity of health care

Parents may have felt pressured to avoid seeking health care due to earlier stay-at-home orders and may continue to do so because they are afraid of getting sick with COVID-19. However, [well-child visits and immunizations](#) are important to maintain the health of your



child. Similarly, social services closures may have impacted many young children's ability to receive other therapeutic services, like speech and occupational health. It is important to ensure children receive continuity of health care, including checking on their development at well-child visits, continuing speech,

mental health, and occupational health therapies (e.g. via telehealth), and receiving vaccines for illnesses such as measles, influenza, whooping cough, and others.

[Developmental milestones](#) matter.

Missed significant life events

Physical distancing can make you feel as if your family's life is on hold. The truth is that the clock keeps ticking. Birthdays, vacation plans, births, and funerals are just a few of the many significant life events that families may miss experiencing during the COVID-19 pandemic. Social distancing, stay-at-home



orders, and limited gatherings have affected the ability of friends and family to come together in-person to celebrate and/or grieve in typical ways. When parents or caregivers experience [grief](#), young children may also experience emotional challenges. It is important to have honest conversations with young children about grief as a normal response to losing someone or something important to you. For pre-verbal children, reading books about emotions can help them begin to understand expression of emotions. Also, be creative in ways to celebrate life events differently—birthday parades and virtual celebrations with family and friends can help.

Loss of security and safety

Being safe and feeling safe are essential for young children. The household income of many families with young children has been affected during the COVID-19 pandemic due to job loss and lost wages. Economic insecurity is linked to [adverse childhood experiences](#) that can negatively impact their social-emotional development, learning, and health.



Young children living in families that are experiencing economic difficulties may feel unsafe. They may have inconsistent access to healthy foods, safe transportation, and housing. Parents' mounting economic stress can increase children's risk for

exposure to violence. With increased time spent at home during COVID-19, some children may have been increasingly exposed to child abuse and neglect, intimate partner violence at home, and sexual violence. It is important for parents to access social supports and services—including mental health services. [Telemental health](#) and national helplines may provide emergency options for emotional and mental health support during a crisis. Moreover, being attentive and responsive to a young child's behaviors or questions can help support feelings of safety.

What can you do?

Steps to Help Provide Stability and Support to Young Children

- Maintain a normal routine
- Talk, listen, and encourage expression
- Under supervision, allow them to crawl and explore, returning to a trusted caregiver
- Give honest and [accurate information](#)
- Teach simple steps to stay healthy
- Be alert for any change in

Recognize and address fear and stress

When adults in the household are worried or stressed, even very young children (birth-2 years) may experience emotional distress. Children ages 3-5 years might worry about getting sick with COVID-19 or about their loved ones getting sick. Excessive worry or sadness, unhealthy eating or sleeping habits, and difficulty with attention and concentration are some signs of stress in young children. These are also signs of stress in adults, as well as worsening of chronic health problems or mental health conditions, and increased use of [tobacco](#) or [alcohol and other substances](#). Adults should seek mental health services or spiritual guidance if they are experiencing worry and [stress](#) that interferes with caretaking, household duties, or their ability to work. Adults can also take steps to provide stability and support to [help children cope](#). Parents can support positive coping through play and talk about emotions. For instance, choosing a comfortable space on the floor, at the child's level, to talk about things that they are seeing adults do differently can provide the opportunity for children to express their fears in a safe place.

To help young children have some sense of control and safety in these circumstances, parents can encourage conversations about being part of a community, such as protecting their family and their neighbors by standing 6 feet apart and wearing a mask. Have these changes become part of a fun and new family routine.

Teach and reinforce everyday preventive actions

There are actions we can take to limit the spread of COVID-19. Be a good role model—if adults wash their hands often, stay at least 6 feet apart from others, and wear their mask in public spaces to help protect themselves and others, then children are more likely to do the same. CDC recommends that children age 2 years and older wear a mask.

Help keep children healthy

Schedule well child and immunizations visits for children. Seek continuity in mental health and occupational health care. Help children [eat healthy](#) and [drink water](#) – instead of sugar sweetened beverages – for [strong teeth](#). Encourage children to play outdoors—it's great for physical and mental health, and can [help children stay healthy](#) and focused.

Help children stay socially connected

Reach out to friends and family via phone or video chats. Write cards or letters to family members they may not be able to visit. Schools may have tips and guidelines to help [support social and emotional needs](#) of children.

Resources

Explore different types of resources available to help you support young people's social, emotional, and mental wellbeing across the lifespan.

Postcard Reminders

Postcard Reminders

Ready to print postcards encouraging COVID-19 mitigation and prevention practices, and socio-emotional wellbeing. Parents can print; children can write a note and send to a loved one. Parents and children can also be inspired by these and make their own out of index cards. *This resource may be useful for children 6-12 years.*



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Español 



English 
Español 



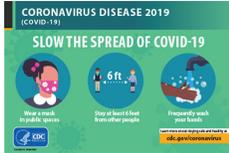
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Door Hangers

These ready-to-print door hangers can serve as reminders for children, young people, and adults alike to remember some COVID-19 prevention and mitigation practices. Parents and children can also be inspired by these and make their own with paper and crayons or other art supplies. *This resource may be useful for children and young people of all ages.*



Mask

English 
Español 



Mask

English 
Español 



Handwashing

English 
Español 

Social
Distancing

English 
Español 

STEM and Other Activity Ideas

Let's get creative! Here are a few ideas on how to have fun while learning how to protect ourselves and others from COVID-19.

- **DIY masks:** Wearing a mask is a very important step that we can take to stop the spread of COVID-19. Make it a family project to create masks. Be creative and stylish. Here's a [video](#) on how to make your own mask.
- **DIY soap:** Handwashing is an easy, inexpensive, and effective way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other germs and keep kids and adults healthy. You can help your kids make their own soap! This resource from [PBS Kids for Parents](#)  tells you how.
- **Handwashing song:** Handwashing can become a lifelong healthy habit if you start teaching it at an early age. Teach kids the [five easy steps for handwashing](#)—wet, lather, scrub, rinse and dry—and the key times to wash hands, such as after using the bathroom or before eating. Make it fun! Make up your own handwashing song, or pick a song your child likes, and sing it for 20 seconds to help teach the length of time to wash your hands.

Children Preparedness

CDC has different resources for families to help their children be ready for emergencies.

- [Backpack Emergency Card](#) 
- [Family Communication Plan](#) 
- [Steps to Protect your Child during Emergencies in the School Day](#)
- [Children in Disasters Emergency Kit Checklists](#)
- [Ready Wrigley!](#)

Other Information Resources

CDC and its federal partners have diverse web resources that can help parents and other caregivers, teachers and other adults support children and young people's social, emotional, mental, and physical well-being:

- [Coping with Stress](#)
- [Helping Children Cope](#)
- [Helping Children Cope with Emergencies](#)
- [Talking to Children about Coronavirus Disease 2019](#)
- [Keep Children Healthy During the COVID-19 Outbreak](#)
- [Help Children Learn at Home](#)
- [Health Equity Considerations and Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups](#)
- [Handwashing: A Family Activity](#)
- [Routine Vaccination During the COVID-19 Outbreak](#)
- [Grief and Loss](#)
- [Essentials for Parenting Toddlers and Preschoolers](#)
- [Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACEs\)](#)
- [Positive Parenting Tips](#)
- [Children's Mental Health](#)
- [BAM! Body and Mind: Classroom Resources for Teachers](#)
- [VetoViolence](#)
- [StopBullying.gov](#) 
- [Youth.gov: Understanding and Coping with Trauma & Building Resiliency](#) 

Last Updated Aug. 20, 2020

Content source: [National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases \(NCIRD\), Division of Viral Diseases](#)